

WHITE PAPER

Assisting Communities to Access EU Funds for Inclusion

The “Project Generation Model” Piloted by the Open Society Foundations (OSF)

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Making the Most of EU Funds for Roma

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

National governments can greatly enhance the implementation of their National Roma Integration Strategies and social inclusion more broadly. One proven way of doing this is by providing assistance to local authorities and organizations to access and implement projects financed by European Structural and Investment Funds.

The Making the Most of EU Funds for Roma (MtM) Program of the Open Society Foundations has worked for more than five years with local communities to leverage EU funds for social inclusion projects targeting Roma, as well as other disadvantaged communities. This paper summarizes the experiences and methodologies employed by MtM, with it in mind that national authorities—particularly in new member states benefiting from Structural Funds—might be keen to replicate a similar model to advance their own social inclusion goals.

MtM's principal tool has been a so-called Project Generation Facility (PGF). The PGF services have been used by hundreds of municipalities and NGOs to design, plan, submit for funding, and implement social inclusion projects with EU funds. By investing EUR 4.2 million over five years (2009-2013), PGF services leveraged some EUR 28.2 million for social inclusion interventions in 400 communities in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. Put differently, for every Euro PGF invested¹ it returned nearly 7 Euros to local communities. Among many other outcomes, PGFs have helped communities launch social services for early childhood development, extracurricular programs for students, and social enterprises to generate employment for youth and women. Importantly, PGFs are designed to leave behind newly-created capacities in the local communities to sustain progress after the duration of the projects.

National governments can establish similar support mechanisms for local communities in order to intensify local spending of EU funds for social inclusion. This assistance is most relevant for EU Member States with sizeable Roma communities including Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. It can be provided with designated funding from Operational Programs.

¹ The cost breakdown does not include PGF management, i.e. the salaries of one senior and one junior program manager, which were covered directly by OSF.

INTRODUCTION

How can EU funds reach Roma and others in Central and Eastern European countries who suffer the highest levels of exclusion? This question is of paramount concern in inclusion policy debates in the EU and at national level. Whereas the National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) of each country in the region expressed intentions to work towards Roma integration, EU member states with sizeable Roma populations spend precariously little on this goal. One of the biggest obstacles is a lack of incentives, skills and institutional capacity at local level for social inclusion investments from the EU funds targeting Roma populations. To remedy this situation, governments can implement programs to build the capacities of local actors—i.e. local governments, NGOs and entrepreneurs—to design and implement EU projects to remedy social exclusion.

The EU Cohesion Policy 2014-2020 regulations require that Member States allocate appropriate resources from the Structural Funds for capacity building in order to enhance the involvement of social partners and nongovernmental organizations in the programming and implementation of EU funds. In particular, the European Social Fund (ESF) 2014-2020 Regulation emphasize that, “managing authorities of an operational programme in a region [...] or in a Member State eligible for support from the Cohesion Fund shall ensure that an appropriate amount of ESF resources is allocated to capacity building for non-governmental organisations” in particular in the fields of social inclusion, gender equality and equal opportunities.² Furthermore, the Thematic ex-ante Conditionalities in the Common Provisions for the EU’s Cohesion Policy require national governments to provide support to relevant stakeholders for submitting project applications and for implementing projects in connection with the National Roma Integration Strategies.³

This document analyzes the conditions and the resources needed to make this support effective and to better bridge the disconnect between EU funding instruments on the one hand and the fight against poverty and social exclusion at local level on the other. The findings are derived from five years of on-the-ground experience in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia by MtM and its implementing partners (civil society, municipal officials, independent experts).

PROPOSAL FOR ACTION BY NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS

MtM recommends its Project Generation Facility (PGF) model for assistance to local communities to increase the flow of development funds for disadvantaged areas and population groups. This model can be replicated by national governments with EU funds earmarked in thematic and multi-objective Operational Programs.

² REGULATION (EU) No 1304/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 17 December 2013 on the European Social Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006, Article 6(3),

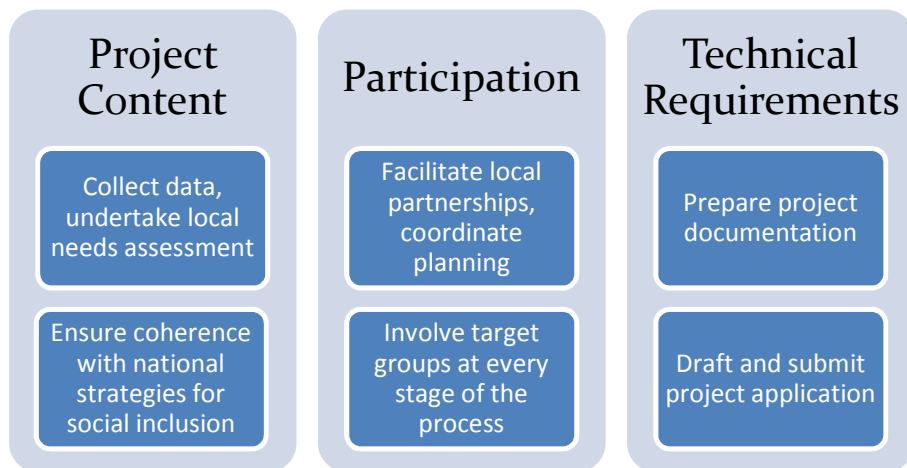
³REGULATION (EU) No 1303/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 17 December 2013 laying down the common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, Annex IX, Thematic ex- ante Conditionalities.

TYPES OF SERVICES

The scope of assistance includes two types of services which are tailored to the needs of clients and ensure client participation in the delivery of the final products:

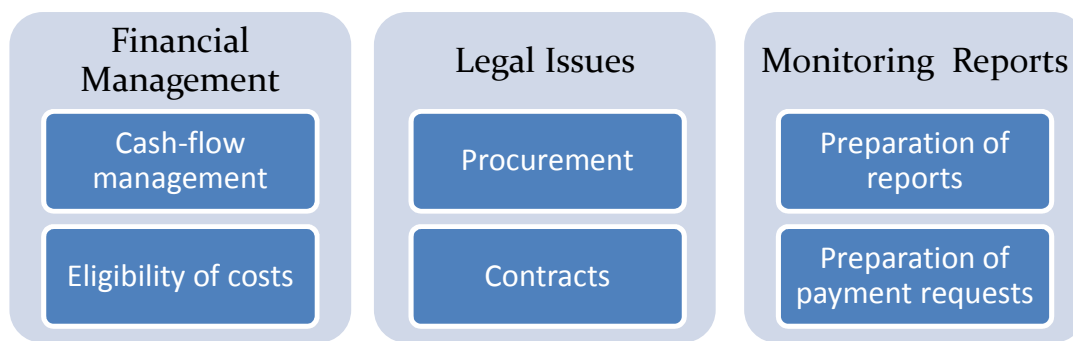
1. **Project generation assistance** is aimed at developing project ideas and preparing project proposals to harness EU funds. It covers three areas:
 - **Project content:** Local authorities and other stakeholders are assisted to make an assessment of local needs and design intervention responses that correspond to the local conditions and are coherent with the national objectives regarding social inclusion and equality policies (e.g. National Roma Integration Strategy).
 - **Participation:** The services facilitate local partnerships and the direct participation of the target groups and beneficiaries. Project owners and their partners are assisted to define the roles and responsibilities of each actor in the future project.
 - **Technical requirements:** Project owners receive technical assistance to prepare the project documentation and project application.

Project generation assistance



2. **Mentoring** throughout the project implementation phase helps implementers of EU projects successfully fulfill the project goals and objectives as well as meet implementation and reporting requirements. Organizations receive practical support to prepare high-quality activity and budget plans; to maintain a positive cash-flow throughout the project; and to secure reimbursements for all project costs.

Mentoring

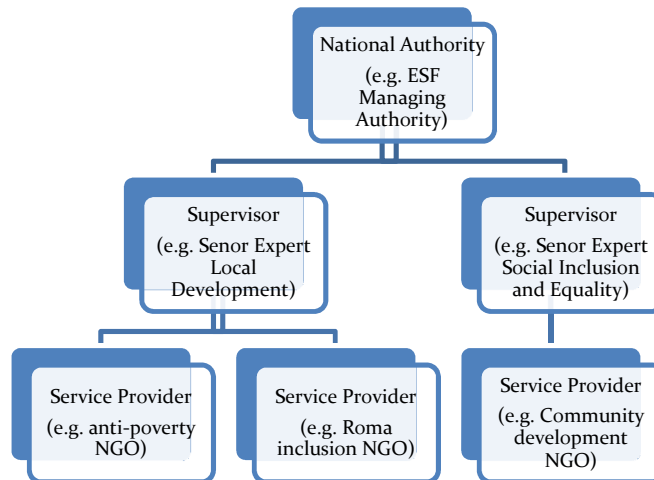


ORGANIZATION OF THE SERVICES

When organizing the above-mentioned services, national authorities are recommended pay attention to the following:

- A **national authority** should contract service providers and supervisors of the services. The national authority can be, for example, the central coordinating body for the implementation of EU funds (when the central coordination body is engaged in social inclusion issues), the managing authority for EU funds for social inclusion (when one managing authority is responsible for most of the EU funds for social inclusion), or the national authority for social inclusion (when there is a strong body with responsibility for EU funds as well).
- **Service providers** should possess an in-depth understanding of the concept as well as the practicalities of equality mainstreaming. They should have the ability to establish trust-based cooperation with local communities (both Roma and non-Roma). And they should have a proven track record of designing and implementing EU projects. Service providers can be selected through an open call.
- **Supervisors** of the services should ensure that the services are tailored to actual local level needs and do not end up relegated to formal trainings of various stakeholders. The tasks of the Supervisors include:
 - Drafting the Terms of Reference for service providers,
 - Monitoring service provision (including receiving, commenting on and approving progress reports of service providers as well as undertaking regular site visits of projects generated and/or mentored),
 - Organizing evaluations of services rendered (drafting Terms of Reference for evaluators, selecting evaluators, commenting on and approving drafts).

Supervision of the services can be fulfilled by external senior experts (e.g. one full time person or two half time persons) better than civil servants. Supervisors can also be selected through an open call — experience and reputation being the strongest selection criteria.



WHAT IS A PGF?

The Project Generation Facility (PGF) is a platform of country-specific services for assistance to local communities to enhance social inclusion investments. The PGF concept was developed by the Making the Most of EU Funds for Roma Inclusion Program of the Open Society Foundations. Because of its focus on social inclusion, PGF addresses primarily Roma populations, who remain the most disadvantaged group in the region. But PGFs do not ignore the needs of other impoverished or discriminated against segments of the population living in the same municipalities or areas. With PGF support, local authorities, community organizations and other actors can:

- Access **more financial resources** from several EU funds, including the European Social Fund, the European Regional Development Fund, and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development;
- Improve the **targeting of the funds** to reach out to the most deprived citizens;
- Obtain and/or upgrade skills in project planning and project management;
- Learn and implement innovative ideas and best practices related to Roma inclusion;
- Enhance the **quality of EU projects** and their impact;
- Improve local development planning and delivery of **inclusive social services**.

Planning Comprehensive Social Inclusion

The municipality of Nitra nad Ipl'om, Slovakia received a Best Practice Award at the Mayors Making the Most of EU Funds for Roma Inclusion (MERI) Conference in 2012 in Budapest. In 2009, with the help of the PGF service, Nitra nad Ipl'om prepared a complex development plan that covered housing, education, employment and health. The PGF experts organized local consultations with Roma and non-Roma citizens (as well as technical experts) in order to assess their needs and collect ideas for action. Based on the comprehensive plan, the PGF service also helped Nitra nad Ipl'om to apply for and obtain EU funding for social work and for creating new jobs in the village for marginalized people. Source: Roma Institute, Slovakia, www.romainstitute.org

WHAT CHALLENGES AT THE LOCAL LEVEL DOES PGF ADDRESS?

Local authorities, community organizations and other local actors face various challenges when trying to access and deploy EU Structural and Investment Funds for enhancing social inclusion and anti-poverty programs. These include:

- Identifying **relevant funding opportunities** in various Operational Programs;
- Understanding the **conditions and requirements** of funding calls;
- Collecting evidence from the field, i.e. **assessments of local needs**, to support the design of interventions;
- Building **collaborative partnerships** with the target group and other stakeholders;
- Learning and transposing innovative social inclusion ideas;
- Securing adequate **administrative capacity** to prepare project proposals and applications;
- Ensuring sufficient **management capacities** and experience to implement EU-funded projects;
- Navigating **budgetary restrictions** in the use of commercial services for EU project generation.

In the 2007-2013 budget period, municipalities of various sizes and locations have not used the potential of EU funds proportionately to their local needs. This tendency resulted in low targeting of Roma populations and a lack of systematic NRIS implementation.

HOW DO POLICY-MAKERS BENEFIT FROM THE PGF?

PGF services can influence the achievement of policy objectives at both local and national levels because they:

- Enhance local implementation of national inclusion strategies;
- Increase the spending of EU funds for social inclusion;
- Improve the quality of project applications for EU funds;

- Improve the quality of project management;
- Develop a **knowledge base** for social inclusion interventions;
- Strengthen the governance of local inclusion policies by enhancing **collaboration between citizens and local governments**;
- Capture lessons learned and best practices for **peer learning** in the field of social inclusion.

Needs Assessment

In 2012, the PGF service in Bulgaria conducted a survey of 300 Roma households in the town of Dupnitsa. The survey was done to support the planning and implementation of a pilot project for social housing in Dupnitsa funded by the European Regional Development Fund and implemented by the municipality. The data obtained can be used to estimate the size of needed homes, to design criteria for beneficiary selection, and to establish supportive measures for those receiving new homes.

Source: Open Society Institute, Sofia, Bulgaria, <http://pgf.osi.bg/pgf.php>

HOW DO PROJECT GENERATION AND MENTORING OPERATE?

SERVICE DELIVERY AGENTS

In the MtM model the services are delivered by non-governmental organizations that have presence in the target localities. The advantages of this model are:

- experience and specialization of the respective NGOs in their work with Roma and vulnerable groups;
- compared to governmental structures, NGOs are less constrained by bureaucratic rules and can **flexibly respond to needs and requirements in the field**;
- compared to commercial companies that are also active in this market, NGOs have deeper connections with the local communities with which they work on a daily basis delivering a variety of services;
- NGOs usually operate in networks (formal or ad hoc) that increase their access to information, best practices and the disadvantaged groups themselves.

Project Development

In 2009, the local government in the village of Porcsalma, in northeast Hungary, received funds for a Sure Start project aimed at early childhood development in vulnerable communities. The PGF service organized project development meetings in the village over the course of two months and helped to build the project team, which included two Roma women. The meetings clarified the aims, target groups, project activities and budget. Roma representatives were deeply involved in identifying needs and potential solutions to their challenges. Importantly, the mayor of the village participated throughout. The renovation of the Sure Start project building was planned with the use of Roma public workers (plumbers, brick layers and unskilled labour), mostly men, whose children and wives were among the project's target group.

The application was successful and the project received funding.

Source: Autonomia Foundation, Hungary, <http://www.autonomia.hu/>

COMPLEX EXPERTISE

The PGF service is equipped with a multi-disciplinary pool of specialists with expertise in equality and non-discrimination, local development, EU funds management and mediation: Equality and non-discrimination knowledge is crucial to helping local authorities develop inclusive local policies. This includes knowledge of social exclusion mechanisms, broader European equality concepts, and familiarity with Roma inclusion policy objectives, tools, and experiences.

Specialized knowledge of complex EU funding mechanisms ensures that project owners receive competent help to prepare eligible and competitive projects and then to meet the project implementation requirements.

Local development expertise is needed in order to connect local development objectives with the available EU resources.

Mediation skills and inclusive planning expertise are needed to bring together stakeholders to implement common goals of social inclusion.

Participatory Planning

The town of Calarasi in Southern Romania received a Best Practice Award for Roma inclusion at the Mayors Making the Most of EU Funds for Roma Inclusion (MERI) conference in 2012 in Budapest. The project to improve the success rate of Roma children at school was developed with the assistance of the PGF service in Romania. The project idea materialized through extensive consultations with local Roma stakeholders who were facilitated by PGF staff. When the project idea formalized the municipality was invited to become the owner of the project. PGF organized a local Working Group to elaborate the activities of the project and to prepare its documentation. The Working Group included Roma representatives from Calarasi, a Roma NGO and an IT company. The group facilitator was designated by the PGF and had expertise in EU project design.

Source: Civil Society Development Foundation and Romanian Social Development Fund, Romania, www.fdsc.ro; www.frds.ro

LOCAL PARTICIPATION AND PARTNERSHIP

The organizations delivering PGF services actively communicate with local communities throughout the EU project cycle. Participation of local authorities, Roma community

organizations and other stakeholders in the planning and implementation of projects increases the responsibility of local actors, provides them with learning opportunities and strengthens their ownership of the project strategy. The impact of this participatory method is even stronger when the EU project is also implemented in a participatory, consultative manner. Through mentorship assistance, PGF facilitates the implementation phase of EU projects as well.

HOW CAN PROJECT GENERATION AND MENTORING ADDRESS DIFFERENT NEEDS?

Different localities and stakeholders need different amounts, depths and types of PGF support.

SMALL URBAN AND RURAL MUNICIPALITIES

Most PGF field work has been carried out in communities where potential beneficiaries meet the eligibility criteria for EU funds but do not have experience and/or administrative capacity to apply for EU funds. This is a relatively broad category including small towns such as Byala Slatina in northwest Bulgaria; Kolárovo in southern Slovakia; Recaş in Timiș County, Romania, and; Jászfényszaru in central Hungary. It also includes villages such as the Dragalina commune in Calaras County, Romania; the village of Kendice, in Presov district, Slovakia; Porcsalma in eastern Hungary; Hairedin village in northwest Bulgaria, and many others. These are the types of communities that most actively sought PGF services. Depending on the country and skills of the national partners, demand tended to derive equally from public institutions and NGOs in Bulgaria and Romania, from NGOs in Hungary, and from public institutions in Slovakia. This demand covered a broad range of fields with relevance to Roma inclusion such as housing, infrastructure, education, employment, and healthcare.

The need for PGF services arises due to insufficient capacity of local stakeholders to access and manage EU projects. A lack of qualified staff and complex rules and preparatory work required in advance of project submission demotivate potential beneficiaries. Even if hypothetically successful, the same problems affect the project implementation phase which leads to a preoccupation of project owners with the formal implementation rules. This undermines the potential impact of the project. For these types of communities PGF provided complex services during the project preparation and project implementation phases.

Depending on the scale of the EU project and the resources in the respective locality, the project generation phase may take up to a month (for communities with modestly robust capacity and experience); several months to a year (for communities with little or no experience with EU projects); or even more than a year (for extremely disadvantaged locations).

PGF clients have benefitted from social inclusion expertise in the process of designing and implementing projects. The PGF service facilitated consultations between local authorities, Roma and other NGOs that are active in the region. They also provided sector-specific expertise for the design of the projects. The resources of the PGF service in such communities

can also be useful for local governments that are designing or revising their local development strategies.

The expected results are:

- Increased amount of EU funds for social inclusion activities;
- Enhanced competence of municipal staff to identify EU funding opportunities; to develop ideas for EU projects; and to address Roma inclusion and social issues;
- Enhanced capacity of Roma and other NGOs to access and manage EU funds.

SEGREGATED RURAL SETTLEMENTS

Communities that cannot meet the eligibility criteria for EU projects are characterized by:

- Extremely limited human and financial resources
- No or few other institutions aside from local government
- No self-revenues
- No or few/weak civil society organizations
- Rural locations with fragmented settlement structures, high segregation of Roma and exclusion from public services.

These communities would not be able to develop independent capacities to absorb EU funds. PGF services can have a limited effect and their cost is higher compared to other places because capacity-building takes longer. In some countries the PGF services provided by MtM have been the first ever effort in such communities to bring development resources from EU funds. With PGF assistance the communities can access funds as part of larger regional initiatives. PGF can facilitate contacts with stakeholders and professionals both within and outside of the settlements and they can strengthen partnership ties with other organizations that can include them in projects. The expected results include:

- More funds for community development;
- Improved knowledge about the possibilities of accessing EU funds;
- Improved capacity of Roma representatives to participate as equal partners in local discussions about development projects, including local self-organization;
- Inclusion of Roma initiatives (entrepreneurial and other) in larger-scale local development programs.

It is important to recognize, however, that such communities are in need of ongoing support so that they can sustain the results of the assistance that is provided to them. Government efforts should focus on basic service provision and long-term development of local capacities. Global grants that allow beneficiaries to access smaller grants under simplified conditions are a particularly relevant tool for such locations; this vital tool has not been adopted by any of the five countries in the 2007-2013 budget period. This is a significant missed opportunity that should be rectified in the upcoming period.

BIG URBAN MUNICIPALITIES

In cities and bigger towns the deficit of human and financial resources – both in local government and civil society -- tends not to be a serious obstacle to accessing EU funds. More problematic is the absence of systematic inclusion efforts across, which is pronounced throughout the region. Although in big municipalities various Roma related activities are

ongoing, the complex and longstanding problem of “ghettoization” of large and growing numbers of Roma is not addressed by corresponding multidimensional inclusion measures aimed at employment, education, living conditions and participation. Local authorities in such places have yet to seize the opportunities provided by EU funds for spatial integration of Roma and other marginalized communities through an integrated approach including housing, employment, education, healthcare, etc.⁴

PGF services can be useful in the context of large-scale, integrated projects in big urban municipalities. Experiences with integrated housing projects targeting Roma in Dupnitsa, Bulgaria; Cluj-Napoca, Romania; and Pécs, Hungary, suggest that a PGF’s role is important in the planning of projects. A PGF’s method for participatory planning involving many stakeholders is especially relevant for the types of complex projects usually needed in large urban environments. As an expertise hub for social inclusion and equality, PGFs can assist local authorities with the planning of social and economic measures that should complement the physical improvements of housing conditions and the desegregation of Roma communities. PGF is also useful because the service can easily reach out to Roma and other vulnerable groups; this is essential for the needs assessment phase of the project. The expected results include:

- Improved capacity of local authorities to plan complex social inclusion projects;
- Enhanced social inclusion expertise of local institutions.

In urban contexts, PGFs have also proven integral in advancing education, employment and social services -- or a combination of these services. With its focus on Roma and vulnerable communities, PGF services can help the project planner to target the most vulnerable in the framework of social inclusion projects with a broad scope of beneficiaries. PGF services can facilitate contacts and collaboration between local institutions and Roma NGOs or groups that are close to the Roma communities and understand their problems and needs. Because PGF works as a network of experts, it can provide local policy makers with expertise on social inclusion and equality issues for the development of their strategic documents.

Depending on domestic conditions, the classification of clients and needs for assistance should be further refined country by country.

WHAT ARE THE COSTS OF PROJECT GENERATION AND MENTORING?

UNIT COSTS OF PROJECT GENERATION AND MENTORING

The unit costs of project generation depend on two main variables: the capacity of the project owner organization and the size of the project.

- The capacities of the potential project owner organizations, e.g. municipalities and NGOs, tend to be weak in communities with significant Roma populations. Still, there

⁴ In 2010, the European Parliament endorsed the use of Structural Funds for housing expenditure for marginalized communities in the context of integrated interventions. See Regulation 437/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2010:132:0001:0002:EN:PDF>.

are substantial variations. In some communities there is at least one organization that has already implemented EU-funded or similar projects for social inclusion. In other communities there may be no such organization, but there are community leaders who have the requisite vision and organizational skills. In other communities – including some with the greatest social inclusion needs – there is no such community leader.

While in the first and second group of communities project generation may have a narrower scope starting from a project idea and design, in the third group of communities project generation will often require a lengthy set of interventions ranging from basic community-building activities, to broad consultations with local stakeholders on local needs, to lessons learning from other communities, etc.

- Most communities can benefit from small scale projects, typically with the European Social Fund (e.g. around 30-50,000 EUR). However, in some communities where for the past several years social inclusion actions have already been initiated, there may be a need for larger projects, also with the European Regional Development Fund (e.g. around 1,000,000 EUR).

The costs of project generation services increase with the size of the project, but not linearly.

Based on MtM experience, unit costs for project generation are as follows.

	Small scale projects -- ESF	Large scale projects -- ESF and/or ERDF
Existence of an organization with some experience	around 6% of project costs; e.g. circa 3,000 EUR for a 50,000 EUR project	around 1,5% of project costs; e.g. circa 15,000 EUR for a 1,000,000 EUR project
No organization with experience but a leader with vision and organizational skills	around 10% of project costs; e.g. circa 4,000 EUR for a 40,000 EUR project	Not relevant
No leader with vision or organizational skills	around 15% of project costs; e.g. circa 4,500 EUR for a 30,000 EUR project	Not relevant

Notes:

1. The above amounts are valid for the EU's new member states with large Roma populations (Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria).
2. Implementing EU projects of such small scale were not feasible in the current period in the given countries but should be feasible in the next period with the foreseen simplifications.

Based on MtM experience, unit costs of mentoring can be around 50% of unit cost for project generation.

TOTAL COST OF PROJECT GENERATION AND MENTORING

MtM has invested around 200,000 EUR in Slovakia, 300,000 EUR in Hungary and Bulgaria, and 400,000 EUR in Romania for annual project generation and mentoring services. With a

total investment of EUR 4.2 million over five years (2009-2013), PGF services leveraged some EUR 28.2 million for social inclusion interventions in 400 communities in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. Put differently, for every Euro PGF invested⁵ it returned nearly 7 Euros to local communities.

These investments can be multiplied with EU funds in order to respond to actual needs. Human resources, however, can only be developed gradually. Thus, project generation and mentoring services should be scaled up gradually, investing around 200-400,000 EUR in the first year, around 300-500,000 EUR in the second year, and around 400-600,000 EUR in the third and subsequent years.

CONCLUSION

In the period since the failed socialist experience ended, no systematic policies have been applied in the post-socialist countries to address the growing challenge of Roma segregation and social decline. With the arrival of large scale EU Structural Funds, an opportunity to address this problem – which afflicts not only Roma but risks the wellbeing of entire societies – has arrived.

This paper explains how EU funds can be harnessed to reverse social exclusion and segregation. PGF services can act as catalysts to link socially excluded groups to these resources. Of course sectoral policies to address employment, housing, education and health care must accompany PGF-generated projects to ensure a rounded approach towards such a complex issue. In the long run no society can be successful without fully integrating its most marginalized and weakest groups

This paper demonstrates that concrete steps can be taken to connect EU structural funds to Roma social inclusion objectives. If social inclusion is important to decision makers, it can be accomplished. The proven tools exist. The financial resources to make significant headway are available. With political will, motivated partners and the sharing of good practices – such as PGF – transformative steps can be taken to bring an end to this dark chapter of Roma exclusion in democratic Europe. MtM stands ready to advise and assist others interested in carrying out these goals.

⁵ The cost breakdown does not include PGF management, i.e. the salaries of one senior and one junior program manager, which were covered directly by OSF.

CONTACT INFO

The paper can be downloaded at:

<http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/about/programs/making-most-eu-funds-roma>

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